

# “Bring the Little Children to Me: A Plea for Life” // Luke 18:15–17 // In Step #11

[Bumper video: Adoption story]

If you've truly experienced the gospel then you can't help but *live out* the gospel...and there are few better and more beautiful pictures of the gospel than adoption. I'm so grateful for Cheryl and for the plethora of other Summit families who aspire to such a high and honored calling. Amen?

Hey one quick thing before we get started I want to remind you of--our **Regional Prayer Gatherings happening next Saturday, Oct. 30 at 4pm all of our permanent locations** (CPC, BCC, Blue Ridge, Apex, SEE). I can think of few things more important than our fervency and zeal in prayer as we get started here in 2021. I'm asking you--I'm *imploring you*--to make this a priority for you and your family next weekend. All details and RSVP info is at [summitchurch.com](http://summitchurch.com). Okay?

**Open your Bible to Luke 18.** Last year in our series leading up to the election I preached a message from Luke 10 on the Good Samaritan in which we saw that Jesus said it is the duty of all Christians to care about all forms of injustice around them, whether it affects us directly or not. He **tells a story about a Jewish man** who had been beaten up and left bleeding on the side of the road, and two Jewish religious leaders walked right past him--good and respectable men, no doubt, but they didn't know the bleeding man and they had not been the ones who beat him up, so they didn't feel responsible to help him. **Through this story, Jesus taught** that taking care of the vulnerable and the hurting around us is our responsibility--whether or not we had anything to do with his situation. **Injustice in the eyes of God, you see, seen through the lens of Scripture, is not just cheating someone.** This is new for some of you--but Injustice in God's eyes, in both the Old and New Testaments, is seeing someone in need and being in a position where you can help them and failing to do that.

That is a consistent one that runs throughout the Gospel of Luke. For Luke, it is a defining feature of following Jesus. If your life is not defined by caring for the vulnerable, you can no more say you are a follower of Jesus than you could if you were openly sleeping around or refusing to read your Bible and go to church.

That's the backdrop for what happens in **Luke 18:15** People were bringing infants to him so that he might touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 Jesus, however, invited them: "Let the little children come to me, and don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

The disciples, like many in Jewish culture, did not value children. The needs of children were not nearly significant as the needs of adults. But Jesus says that children--who for Luke represent all the vulnerable--are his first priority. As a matter of fact, children (and other vulnerable people) are the ones in the best posture to receive Jesus' kingdom. And, in fact, Jesus says, unless we learn to grasp that we are all like them, spiritual speaking--vulnerable and helpless--we'll never actually reach out for the Kingdom of God. And when we do

grasp that--that we are all vulnerable and helpless like children--we'll always have a special place in our hearts for the vulnerable and the helpless.

**There are lots of places where we could apply this, but I want to focus today on the place Jesus did--children; particularly children in their most vulnerable state right now: in the womb.**

Now, before you tense up, let me just acknowledge: I'm always a little bit conflicted on this--I don't want to come off like a partisan culture warrior. But here's the thing: **this should not be a political issue.** Regardless of your approach to other political questions, Christians should be absolutely united on this.

Second thing I want to say out of that gate: If your conviction to care for the preborn is sincere, this is not the only "life" issue you'll care about. You'll demonstrate compassion for the vulnerable anywhere around you, from the womb to the tomb.

To quote the **Christian philosopher Thaddeus Williams**, whom I draw on a lot today: **"Christians should not be known so much as culture warriors as they are Good Samaritans who stop for battered image-bearers wherever they find them."**<sup>1</sup> Again, if this conviction is sincere, your heart will go out to the vulnerable everywhere--of whatever age or culture or location in the world. Your advocacy for the preborn will be matched by your compassion toward the mother in despair who sometimes felt like she had no other choice.

**Which leads me to another fear I have** in this, which is that some of you may hear this like me standing up here pointing at you with a finger of judgment regarding one of the most painful chapters of your life. I know that some of you *felt like* you didn't have a choice. I read that **sixty-four percent** of women who get abortions said that they felt strong pressure from others to do so), and I want to talk about that today. **But here's the thing I want you to know right out of the gate: Jesus' primary purpose in coming to earth was not to stop abortions. Nor was it to condemn those who commit abortions. His primary purpose was to die for abortion-committing sinners and every other kind of sinner.** And that means the heart of Christianity is not the legislation of a culture of life; the heart of Christianity is Jesus Christ dying and rising from the dead to save people whose lives are filled with the deadly effects of sin.<sup>2</sup> It's because we have experienced this gift of eternal life that we value a culture of life--pro-life advocacy is the result of our experience with the gospel, not the heart of that the gospel. Let me be very clear: If you've had an abortion: **The Lord Jesus stands before you this weekend** not with a finger pointed in condemnation but with arms opened wide in mercy.

One final elephant in the room: **Some of you may think that I, as a man, and a white man to boot, have no right to talk about this. You say, "No womb, no say!"**

- But I would just ask you, gently, to consider: Since when is speaking out for justice something only a few of us can do? Is speaking up for the poor something only the poor can do? Is speaking up against the unjust treatment of minorities something only minorities can do? The Good Samaritan had an obligation to speak up for the man on the side of the road even if he'd never been beaten up himself. I'm going to present

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<sup>1</sup> Thaddeus Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth* (Loc 3011)

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, "Abortion and the Narrow Way that Leads to Life," (Matthew 7:7-14).

reason and Scripture to you today and I want you to evaluate those things on the basis of their merit, not my gender.<sup>3</sup>

- **What is happening today—and what should be happening every week—is NOT that you're listening to the opinions of a white man.** No, we gather to listen to what God has to say about this. If I say anything today that contradicts what's in this Book, please, ignore it. But if I say anything today that is found in this Book, I urge you, cling to it.<sup>4</sup>

**So, to begin: if we're going to look at the world with the eyes of the Good Samaritan**, we have to be honest about the state of the victim in front of us.

#### **Listen to this:**

- “In 2018 abortion was the leading cause of death worldwide, with 42 million victims. That is roughly seven holocausts in a single year.”<sup>5</sup>
- Each year in our country, close to 900,000 babies are electively aborted, which is more than the total amount of American casualties in BOTH World Wars and the Vietnam War combined.
- Every year. In Iceland, which many consider a progressive utopia, “the abortion rate for children diagnosed with Down syndrome now approaches 100 percent.” In the United States, 90 percent of preborn humans diagnosed with Downs are terminated.<sup>6</sup>
- Justice Clarence Thomas of the U.S. Supreme Court noted in a dissenting opinion he wrote on an abortion case, “*In Asia, widespread sex selective abortions have led to 160 million missing women--which more than the entire female population of the United States right now. Recent studies suggest that selective abortions of baby girls are common in the United States also.*”
- In NYC, each year more black image-bearers are aborted than are born.<sup>7</sup>

I agree with **Pastor Thabiti Anyabwile** who says, “**It's staggeringly clear that the largest scale injustice, the most morally outrageous thing happening in our society today is the killing of children in the womb.**”<sup>8</sup>

**Listen: Do you care about the innocent?** Do you want to defend the vulnerable? Are you committed to social justice? Do you want to fight systemic injustice? There are few places where dire urgency meets such moral clarity meets and clear opportunity as with the cause of the protection of children in the womb.

Now, I know a lot of people will say, “**Well, it's a lot more complex than this.** The baby is a part of a woman's body, and we need to respect her right to privacy and sovereignty over her body.” And I understand that: A

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<sup>3</sup> I love how Thaddeus Williams says this: “We don't evaluate arguments by the nature of the private parts of those who make them. Arguments don't have private parts, people do.”

<sup>4</sup> Plus, if you want to get technical about it, the ruling of Roe vs. Wade in 1973 that legalized abortion was handed down by 7 white men. Why must we automatically accept what they decided as truth?

<sup>5</sup> Thaddeus Williams, Loc 3730.

<sup>6</sup> Caroline Mansfield, “Termination Rates After Prenatal Diagnosis Of Down Syndrome, Spina Bifida... *Prenatal Diagnosis* 19:9 (1999): 808-12

<sup>7</sup> Clarence Thomas, “Box vs. Planned Parenthood of Indiana and Kentucky,” citing Mara Hvistendahl, “Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men.”

<sup>8</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, “Speak Up for the Vulnerable,” preached at SEBTS on January 25, 2019.

woman's right to privacy and her sovereignty over her body is an important concept. **But I want us to think clearly about this.**

There's really only **2 premises** in the reasoning for protecting the preborn:

- **Premise #1: The willful taking of innocent human lives is immoral.**
- **Premise #2: The preborn is an innocent human life.**

Most people won't object to premise 1; It's premise 2 they get hung up on. "Calling the preborn a 'human life' is your opinion," they say. "When life begins and that organism gains personhood is a matter of opinion--some way conception; some say at the first heartbeat, some say it is at the first brain waves or when it becomes sentient (that is, in a state where you are thinking conscious thoughts); it could be when the baby is able to live on its own (that's called viability); or it could be the moment of actual birth."

**But scientifically, there is no question.** We're not in the realm of opinion here; we're in the realm of biology. At conception, that organism becomes a living thing with its own genetic code. Hear me out.

- If you say "life begins at birth." Well, the only difference in a baby 5 seconds prior to conception and 5 seconds after birth is location, which seems like an arbitrary foundation for personhood.<sup>9</sup> Scientifically, what is the difference in the nature of the baby 5 seconds before birth and 5 seconds after?
- If you say, "Life begins with brain function, when the baby can experience pain." Well, first, note that that contradicts the position that abortion is a fundamental woman's right through all nine months of pregnancy. But second, does that mean we have lost our right to life when we are not in a sentient state? If I go into a temporary coma, my strong preference would be that you not kill me, even though I'm not sentient, particularly if you were sure I was going to wake up in 9 months.
- If you say, "Life begins at viability," (when the baby can live on its own). Well, isn't that contingent on the advancement of technology? Every year, newer, better technology pushes "viability" back. This also seems like a strange criteria for when personhood begins. In fact, **as many point out, a strong case could be made that the more dependent a person is, the more vulnerable, the more helpless they are, the more we should do as a society to protect it.** In the words of Cardinal Roger Mahony says, **"We judge any society or nation on the basis of how it treats its weakest members—the last, the least, and the littlest."**

Maybe you respond, "But until birth it is technically part of her body, so she has the right to do with it what she wants."

- But that's not true. That baby is intimately attached to her body for a period of time, yes, but it's not part of it. "From the moment of conception, that baby has its own DNA--it's own unique genetic code, a unique heart, circulatory system, brain, and more. If you're saying it is a part of her body, does that mean SHE herself has 2 brains, 2 hearts, and 4 arms and legs?"<sup>10</sup> No, it's a separate person intimately attached to her body.

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<sup>9</sup> Thaddeus Williams, p. 176.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 174.

- Scripture certainly presents the preborn child as its own person: The Psalmist of Psalm 139 says that in the womb God knew me by name, as a person; there I was fearfully and wonderfully made, knit together according to the plan of God with his purpose for me already in mind.
- Scripture tells us that John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth's womb because his spirit--in the womb--was filled with the Spirit when he came into the presence of Jesus.
- And we all know our rights over our bodies are not absolute as far as the law is concerned. "Prostitution is illegal in most states, and nowhere in the US can you legally pour drugs into your body as an exercise of bodily freedom."<sup>11</sup>

**Even if you are unclear on this**--unsure as to when actual personhood begins--shouldn't you err on the side of life? I've heard people say, "Well, since we're not sure when life begins, people should be free to decide for themselves." First, as I've shown you, we actually are clear about when life begins; but even if we weren't, how would that line of thinking make any sense? Thaddeus Williams says, *"If you're hunting in the woods and hear a rustling in the bushes and you're uncertain as to whether it's your friend or a deer, morality and common sense dictate that you don't pull the trigger, given the potential risk of murder."*<sup>12</sup>

**You say, "Well, if abortion were illegal people would just go back to coat hangers and back alley butchers."**

Two things to say here:

- First, just to be clear, a total of 39 women died the year before Roe vs. Wade in illegal abortions.
- That's tragic, of course, but compare that to 900,000 babies who died in state-sanctioned abortions this year.
- Second, again quoting Thaddeus Williams: the "coat hanger" argument misses the point that the preborn are people." Pointing out some negative side effects of a restriction doesn't justify the sanctioning of murder.<sup>13</sup>

**People say, "What about in the case of genetic disabilities? We shouldn't bring babies into the world with genetic disabilities whose lives will be reduced to hardship and unhappiness."**

- First, note that people with disabilities are vehemently opposed to this argument. There is not a single organization of disabled people in the world I know of that is in favor of elective abortion of those who have disabilities.<sup>14</sup>
  - And I'd love to introduce you to two church members: **Anna Williamson and Daniel Ritchie.** Twitter/Insta: Two people who are the most full of life people I know...
- **Second, you are making a false correlation between genetic deformities and unhappiness.** Listen to this: "No study... has found that handicapapad persons are more likely than non-handicapped persons to want to die or commit suicide... In fact, of the 200 consecutive suicides at the Baltimore Morgue... none had been committed by people with congenital deformities."<sup>15</sup> None! If you're trying to say that we should be

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Thaddeus Williams, p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 176

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

able to abort those whom we know in advance are the most likely to be unhappy, it's not those with genetic deformities that you should start with. They are on the happy end of the scale.

- **And** who are we to determine when another life is not worth living?
- Again: this whole line of thinking misses the point: The preborn baby is a person. And what we think they might experience hardship doesn't justify killing them, does it?

I've heard people say, **"Abortion sometimes help poor women escape crushing financial burdens. Banning abortion would cause overpopulation and massive poverty."**

- This kind of statement confuses "finding a solution" with "eliminating a problem." Think of it this way: Homelessness is also a problem, right? But who argues that we could round the homeless up and execute them? That would be barbaric. You might have eliminated a problem, but that's a far cry from coming up with a solution." **If poverty is a problem, let's keep working to find a solution.**
- Again, the point is--the preborn are people. You can't justify killing a person because it eliminates a problem. Because if you use that reasoning there, couldn't you use that same line of reasoning to justify eliminating other financially burdensome groups?

**People then say, "Well, what about in cases of rape or incest?"**

- First, let me say I can't imagine the pain involved in something like this. It's unspeakable. But just to keep it in perspective. These tragic and heartbreaking cases make up less than 1% of all abortions. When someone says this to me, I always ask them: "So are you agreeing then that the other 99% of abortions are indeed immoral?"
- **But the bigger point is this:** Does the fact that that baby got there by rape or incest change the fact that they are still a person? Does the circumstances of your birth take away from your personhood? If a grown adult found out that they were conceived by rape, would that reduce their value as a person? **Keep your eye on the central question:** Is the preborn baby a person?"<sup>16</sup> If they are, how they became a person is irrelevant before birth and after.

**I'm getting into the weeds here a little bit because I want you to see that scientifically and Scripturally there is no question about how Jesus feels about THESE little children.** "Let them come to me," he says. Their lives are precious and valuable. If you care about me, you'll care about them, and not dismiss them (like the disciples did in this story) as an inconvenience.

**Now, I know some of you may be sitting there and saying,** "OK, this sounds like a pretty eloquent defense of life." But the question we're supposed to ask, according to the parable of the Good Samaritan, is: **What's MY responsibility?** The point is not merely THINKING the right thing, it's DOING the right thing. And all of us--ALL OF US--have a role in promoting a culture of life.

**I want you to go to Proverbs 31:** This is a passage that Jesus would have been VERY familiar with. Every Jewish boy was reared on the Proverbs, and this section was one of the most well-known. This was how Jesus'

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<sup>16</sup> Scott Rae, *Moral Choices*, 136.

learned to think about justice. And from this I have a **word for followers of Jesus**, and then a **word to those of you who may be sitting there filled with regret** or wondering what you should do.

**Prov 31: 1** “The words of King Lemuel, a pronouncement that his mother taught him... Speak up for those who have no voice, for the justice of all who are dispossessed. 9 Speak up, judge righteously, and defend the cause of the oppressed and needy.”

The African American pastor Thabiti Anyabwile says that this passage is crucial in instructing us how to respond to the abortion crisis because it tells us **what** God’s requirement is, the **scope** of that requirement, and even **how we learn** that requirement.

**First, WHAT is our responsibility?** Vs. **8** *“Speak up for those who have no voice...”*

What better description of the preborn could there be than “those who have no voice”? No one hears their screams as they’re slain in the womb--We know they feel pain. Through microscopic cameras we see them flinch as they are injected with poison; we see their heartbeats spike as they’re killed. But we don’t hear their voices. Some of them are old enough that if they were just 6 inches further out of the womb we could hear their screams. But because they’re left in the womb when their life is taken we don’t hear them.

So we are obligated to speak for them. “Speak up” is repeated twice. Once in vs. 8; once in vs. 9. Speak up, the King says. Speak up. Say something. As with the story of the Good Samaritan, not speaking up in the face of injustice makes you guilty of your own injustice.

It’s like **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, said in regards to racial injustice: **“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter...”** (and) **“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”** Silence IS support. Speak up.

**And hey, I want to stop here and say something you may not hear me say a lot:** But I want to ask you to seriously consider whether or not God might be leading some of you to take on the mantle of government leadership for causes like these. We need godly people (in both political parties) advocating for this. As I said, this should not be a partisan issue--much like care for the refugee or respect for the immigrant should not be partisan issues. I don’t care what your political party is--all Christians should be united in seeing the removal of this scourge from our land.

**Second, Proverbs 31 shows us the SCOPE of that responsibility:** **8 ...Speak up for the justice of ALL who are dispossessed.** All.

It’s like I said at the beginning: this shouldn’t be the only life issue you care about. For some people, pro-life is like a moral club they use in the culture war, even as they ignore any suffering or needs of other vulnerable groups around them. **If you really care about the vulnerable we’ll see you advocating for life everywhere--for the poor, for the discriminated against, for the marginalized and the forgotten about of all**

**ages and all races.** Maybe most of all you'll be brokenhearted about those around the world with no access to the gospel. The greatest injustice in the world is the failure of the church to get the gospel to lost people.

It's like I said: A real commitment to life is demonstrated by advocacy for the vulnerable from the womb to the tomb.

**And BTW, just so you know, Christians have always done this.** Frankly, I get tired of people using this as a club against Christians: "All you care about it is the preborn!" Since 1973, Christians have built thousands of crisis pregnancy centers to assist families in crisis. For every 1 abortion clinic in America Christians have built 3 pregnancy centers to assist women in crisis. And go into foster services and adoption agencies and there you will find the group represented most are pro-life Christians or their friends. Christians have built more hospitals around the world than any other single group--for a long time in sub-Saharan African there was not a single hospital that hadn't been built by a Christian mission. So don't believe the tired trope that followers of Jesus only care about the preborn. It's just not true.

And, to note: **A lot of our ministry to our community here centers around this issue.** On our website, [summitchurch.com](http://summitchurch.com), you'll find [more than 10 ways](#) we are already involved deeply in this at this church, ways in which YOU can (and many of you should!) get involved today.

**Third, HOW do we learn that responsibility? Vs. 1** "The words of King Lemuel, a pronouncement *that his mother taught him...*

Wow, I love this. A commitment to preserve life and a commitment to protect the vulnerable is learned in the home. King Lemuel developed this passion from his momma.<sup>17</sup>

Moms, your children should hear you talk about our responsibility to speak up for the vulnerable. They should see that in how you teach the older siblings to care for their weaker and more vulnerable younger sibling. When that bigger sister sees her younger sister going for that one toy and she decides that because she's bigger she can just take it from her. That's the place where you teach her about the sin in her heart and how Jesus wants her to be a young lady who looks out for and honors her younger sister. Or dads, when your son comes home talking about the unpopular kid who is being picked on and bullied on the playground, and you teach him that it's his responsibility to stand up for the weak--even if it costs him. You can't just walk on by.

**A culture of life is not fostered in the news media,** it's grown in the home. That kind of environment ignites the passion for justice and mercy that honors God and fulfills all righteousness.

**Finally, this weekend, I want to give a word to those of you who have sat there through this whole service with a pit in your stomach filled by regret, or guilt, or shame, and fear.**

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<sup>17</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, who was a big champion of human rights in the previous century, said, "Where do universal human rights begin? In small places... the home. That's where people learn that every man, woman, and child deserves equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."



- As I told you at the beginning, the center of Christianity is not a political condemnation of abortion. The center of Christianity--it's heart--is Jesus Christ dying and rising from the dead to save abortion-committing sinners.
- **In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul describes the makeup of the early church.** He lists out several categories of sinful people: thieves, extortionists, abusers, rebellious, the apathetic, the greedy, drunkards and drug addicts, slanderers. You could certainly add abortion to that list. Paul ends the list with this phrase: "**And such were some of you...** Were. Such were some of you. **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified...**" by the blood of Jesus and the Spirit of God.
- **Listen to me: Your abortion doesn't define you.** Thank God that in Christ none of our sins define us anymore. You are a beloved daughter or son of God whose sin Jesus went to a cross to pay for. He has put your sin into the depths of the deepest part of the sea and put up a sign that says "no fishing allowed." "What sin?" he says. "*Though your sins be as scarlet, I have made them white as snow. Behold, I make all things new.*" This is the new reality he wants you to live in. You can't change the past, but you can become a protector and preserver of life now. **One of our teaching pastor's wives had an abortion**--she told her story here last year. God not only forgave her, he set her on a whole new path. He's got a plan for you, too. Because of the cross, your sin is not the last word about you. Because of the resurrection, new life is offered to you.

**Listen, maybe you're 16.** And you just found out you're pregnant. I know you're terrified. And maybe the dad has already long gone, and you're scared. I want you to look around this church. We're here. Look around. There's 500 men here ready to be a part of this boy's life. We're ready to help you raise him. And there's 500 ladies here who are going to step up to help. They're going to shower you with so many gifts it's going to be awkward. We've got you financially, we've got you emotionally. We've got you practically. We've got you, girl. And when that kid turns 18 and walks across that stage to graduate, there's going to be a bunch of us there cheering for him and calling his name and saying "hoot, hoot, hoot" and the Principal is going to have to call us down and tell us we need to show some respect for others but we're not going to care. And if you can't handle any of it, we'll find a family in this church to adopt him.

We're not going to leave you. That man may have run away but we're not, because we serve a God who didn't run away from us. So, don't be afraid. Have that baby. Have that baby. By God's grace you can do this. His grace is enough, momma, his grace is enough. Don't be afraid.<sup>18</sup>

If you're a dad involved in this, tell her you'll support her. Be a man. Don't shirk your responsibility to protect the vulnerable in your life. Again, 64% of women who get abortions say they did so because they felt pressured. Don't be in that 64%. Have the courage to do it God's way. Maybe that feels overwhelming to you. We're here to help you, too.

**A few years ago I preached on this,** and I said similar things to what I said today. Unbeknownst to me, in our congregation that day sat a college-aged girl who had just learned she was pregnant and who was scheduled that afternoon to go in and have an abortion. She said that my words that morning and the spirit of grace in

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<sup>18</sup> I owe the inspiration for this pastoral invitation to Thabiti Anyabwile, "Speak Up for the Vulnerable," preached at SEBTS on January 25, 2019.

our church convinced her to cancel the appointment, choose life for her baby, and put the baby up for adoption.

A year later, into my office walked the family who adopted this baby to show me how God had used his Word.  
(PICTURE)

I get a lot of hate mail when I talk about this. But that one picture makes all those hate letters evaporate into the wind. So speak up, Summit. Speak up for those who have no voice. Defend the cause of the needy and all the oppressed. These are not games we are playing. People's lives depend on our voice and our action. Choose Christ. Choose the way of Christ. Choose life.